

THE
HISTORY
OF
JENNY HICKLING:

AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE.



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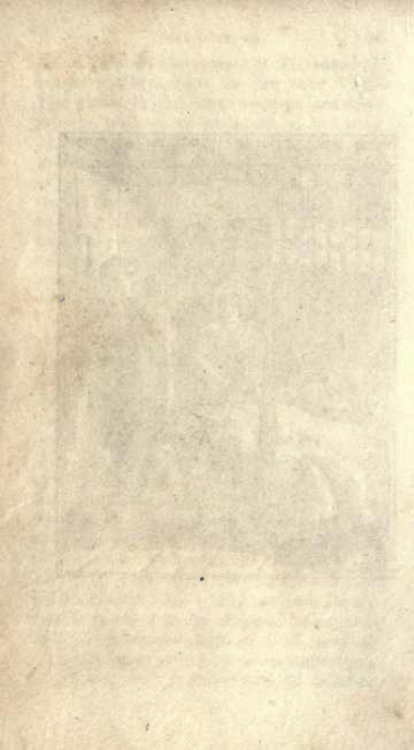
THE
HISTORY
OF
JENNY HICKLING.

As the power of divine grace is best known by its effects, the simple narrative of a poor woman, who lately lived at Wimeswold, in Leicestershire, may, it is hoped, be of some use, by showing that the sanctifying influence of that grace can render life pleasant and useful under all circumstances, and in all situations.

Jenny Hickling was the daughter of poor, but honest parents, who rented a

small farm in the parish of Wimeswold, where she was born in the year 1747. Her father and mother were respectable people, and set an example of industry and activity in their family. This has great influence in forming the characters of children; and Jenny was rendered useful and comfortable, by being taught to assist in what she was able to do, as early as possible. She was strong, healthful, and lively, till the age of thirteen, when she was seized with the palsy, which deprived her of the use of her limbs, and subjected her to the most severe and painful trials. She was immediately confined to her bed, on which she has passed the remainder of her life, and there experienced a variety of conflicts, sufferings, and mercies. On her first seizure, she was brought so low, that for twelve months she could not speak, but made signs for what she wanted. Great and trying as her afflictions were, they were much soothed by the unwearied tenderness of her father and mother, who endeavoured to make her life as comfortable as circumstances would allow. But at this period Jenny was in much distress of mind, being destitute of the knowledge of God, and of her own heart; she was often impatient, vexatious, and troublesome to others,





and miserable in herself. This was particularly the case at holiday times, when she confesses she was ready to tear those about her in pieces, because she could no longer join the sports in which she had so much delighted. But God, who is rich in mercy, was pleased to begin the work of conviction on her heart. She had sometimes looked into the Bible; now she read it with deep attention. From this she learned that she was a sinner; and under the influence of that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance," she was led to pray earnestly for mercy, without which she felt she must perish. She now saw that the chastisements of the Lord were light, compared with what she deserved; and that she *needed all* that was laid upon her. And though she endured much from a deep sense of her guilt, yet it was only preparatory to the light and peace which followed.

At this period she derived considerable instruction and comfort from reading religious books, particularly the Pilgrim's Progress, from which, with the Almighty's teachings, (as she herself expressed it,) she learned much. Discontent and rebellion now gave place to patience and resignation; she was enabled to come to the foot of the cross, and, as a perishing

sinner, to cast herself on that Saviour who hath said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Here she found that rest which is not to be found elsewhere; and as her faith was strengthened, her joy and peace in believing increased.

Jenny was now desirous to make every return in her power to her father and mother for all their kindness. She had for some time employed herself in sewing and knitting for the family, and had taught her younger sister these useful occupations. Divine grace will teach all persons to endeavour to be as useful as possible in their different situations; and Jenny, with the approbation of her friends, determined to open a school.

The sufferings, the patience, and the piety of this poor woman, had excited the sympathy and the respect of her neighbours, and her bed was soon surrounded with between thirty and forty children, whom she regularly taught to read, to knit, to sew, and to mark. It is truly wonderful how a person so circumstanced, a cripple confined to her bed, and totally unable to rise from it, should be able to keep up the sort of authority necessary among so many children, some of whom were probably rude, and ungoverned at home; but such is the fact.



On being asked how she kept them in order? "The Lord," she said, "enables me to keep them in order." She appears to have managed them judiciously. Her method was to win them by kindness. She endeavoured, she said, to make them both love and fear her, as she wished to love and fear her Saviour. But she often found that she wanted wisdom rather than patience. When any of the children behaved improperly, she used to call them to her, and they would suffer themselves to be pinned to the bedclothes, where they were obliged to stand with their backs towards their mistress, which was deemed a great punishment. When obliged to chastise, Jenny always strove to convince her scholars that she corrected them only for their good. Thus she established her authority; and such was the influence which, by judicious conduct, she had obtained, that when any discord arose among the children in the street, for any one to say they would tell Jenny, was sufficient to restore peace.

Not satisfied with the labours of her school, Jenny wished to turn every talent, and every moment, to good account. She therefore took in plain work, and employed herself before the children came, two hours at dinner time, and occasionally till twelve at night, in making

different kinds of garments. She cut out patterns for her various articles, and did all her work with great neatness and exactness. Jenny also taught herself mantua-making, and worked for many persons in the neighbouring villages. By this constant exertion she not only provided herself with necessaries, but was enabled to clothe a sister and a niece.

Jenny was now called to experience new trials; but she had been gradually prepared for them. By a sudden stroke her father was removed, and in a few years her mother died also. The reality of her faith was now proved, for she was enabled to stay herself on God; and she soon found that promise fulfilled, "when my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."

A few years before these events, Jenny's brother had married. He now took the charge of his afflicted relation, occupied the farm, and, in the course of some years, nine children were added to the family, which he supported from its profits. Being now wholly dependant on her brother and sister for the kind attention she so much needed, Jenny resolved to do all she could to lighten their burden, and contribute to their comfort. She continued her school with increasing diligence, and discharged her duty





so much to the satisfaction of those who placed their children under her care, that she never wanted scholars. Parents may hence learn the duty and advantage of giving their children instruction while they have it in their power, as it contributes much to their enjoyment, and prevents their being burthensome to others.

But the sufferings of this poor woman were frequently too severe to allow her to pursue this course without interruption. Her brother was not permitted to occupy the farm a very long time, and the apprehension of his quitting it, and her leaving the abode where she had so long lived, was a great trial to her, especially as there was some difficulty in procuring another farm. At length one was obtained, and a house in the same village provided. Jenny's friends were much concerned lest she should not be able to bear even this removal; for she was so weak and helpless, that the attempt seemed to threaten her life. She begged her brother not to be anxious about her; she wished to go with them, and leave the event to Him who had hitherto so graciously provided for her. A couch was borrowed, on which she was carried with the utmost care. The exertion, gentle as it was, threw her into fits; and the additional sufferings it occasioned, ren-

dered her unable to teach school for some time. She was now much dejected, and prayed that God would support her. What added greatly to her distress was, her not being able to do any thing toward her own maintenance. However, a kind and gracious God, who orders all things for his children's good, so disposed the heart of her brother's wife, that she had long felt and cherished the tenderest affection towards Jenny, and during this helpless state she acted as a mother to her.

At different times this poor sufferer was exercised with violent illnesses, in addition to her usual complaints. At one time she lay six weeks without being able to take any solid food, and was only fed with a tea-spoonful of liquid at a time; but she was at this period full of comfort, and desirous to be gone. However, this was not the will of God concerning her, and she was so far restored as to think herself capable of teaching school again. This being known, her little pupils soon flocked around her, and with pleasure she resumed her task. But her faith and patience were again to be exercised and improved by new trials. She found her strength diminished, her sight impaired, and her infirmities so much increased, that she was soon oblig-

ed to relinquish her employment; and during the last twenty years of her life she was obliged to give up the school altogether.* To this she cheerfully submitted, being convinced that it was the divine will.

Her sister continued to show Jenny every attention; and so great was her affection, that she told her she felt as if she could not live without her, and begged of God that she might be taken first. The conduct of this woman was very exemplary, and the mercy of God was manifest in providing such a friend. During thirty-nine years, which they lived together, she heard no angry words drop from her. Whatever distraction there was in the family, still in patience she possessed her soul. At length this kind relative was seized with a fatal illness;

** It ought to be remarked, that this poor woman, in her late attempts to teach school, has frequently observed, that children are not brought up in the submissive, tractable way they used to be. This is an evil felt among all ranks, and parents have much to answer for respecting it. Let them learn from the example of Eli, 1 Samuel, iii. 13. what a sin it is in the sight of God to suffer their children to do wrong, and not to restrain them.*

she then used to be daily helped to Jenny's bed, to take, as she thought, a last farewell. When the final separation



came, Jenny was almost overpowered; her fits returned, and every moment was expected to end her life. But the same Almighty aid that she had so often experienced, was not withheld under this trial; and, through the goodness of God, she was gradually restored to her usual state of health and peace. Poor Jenny was used to check her regret for the loss of her sister, by saying, "Shall I envy her her happiness? No, my heavenly Father doeth all things well." She often thought she was more to blame than any body, for distrusting him who had so

wonderfully and so graciously provided for her.

The care of the family now, in a great measure, devolved on this poor bed-ridden aunt, and she employed much of her time in making and mending for them. Many nights which were passed almost wholly without sleep, she spent in knitting their stockings; the sheath was pinned to the bed-clothes, and although she did not burn a light, the stockings were formed and finished as neatly as possible. Thus was she enabled, in some measure, to return the kindness which she experienced from her sister, to her children; and her time, by being fully employed, passed much more pleasantly than it would have done had she spent it in complaining and idleness.

The long and continued sufferings, the great patience, and uncommon cheerfulness of this poor woman, had gained her much esteem and respect in the neighbourhood; and she was often resorted to for counsel and advice. Having experienced the happiness of trusting in God, she encouraged others to rely on him, who is "a very present help in time of need."

When she was in tolerable health, almost the whole of Jenny's sabbath was employed in reading, and she had stored

her mind with valuable sentiments from many pious authors, and from psalms and hymns, which she had great delight in repeating. "Correspondence with a condescending Deity," she said, "beguiles the tedious hours, and every promise is a staff, if we could but lean upon it." In seasons of great distress and trial, she had one never-failing solace, which is best expressed in her own words, "Let me go to mighty prayer." She felt her need of a more entire and cheerful confidence; but she had no doubt that he who had begun a good work would carry it on, and she was only desirous to live as much as possible without sin. Notwithstanding the long night of suffering Jenny had endured, (to the glory of divine grace she desired to ascribe it,) she could say she had had more peace and comfort, than anxiety and sorrow.

This poor woman kept her bed sixty-two years, and during the last thirty she was not able to be removed from it. She was chiefly indebted to the kindness of friends for support; but under all discouragements she said, "The Lord will provide. He will not suffer me to want any thing that is good." When she received a favour, she always spoke of the goodness of God. Having had a present of half a guinea to buy a garment, she

said, "I feel myself much obliged by this kindness. But what shall I say when I am assured that my Saviour hath provided a far nobler robe; his righteousness will cover me all over? O that I could feel more love to him who hath loved me so much! During these last few years I have, for the most part, found my mind much stayed upon God. I do not pretend to say that I have experienced any rapturous sensations of joy. I cannot say, in the words of the Apostle, that I have been caught up into the third heaven. But I feel, (as I once heard it described in Gurnall's Christian Armour,) 'The traveller may go as fast, and ride over as much ground, when the sun doth not shine, as when it doth; (though indeed he goes not so merrily on his journey;) nay, sometimes he makes the more haste; for the warm sun may make him lay down and loiter; but when dark and cold, he puts on with more speed. Some graces thrive best (like some flowers) in the shade; such as humility and dependance on God.' This," said she, "is just my case. It seems the shade is fittest for me. I wish my soul to be adorned with the Christian graces of humility and meekness. I am most comfortable when I can feel my dependance on God; and I profit most from those books which

lead to the contemplation of such subjects. I have been much blessed by the prayers and friendly visits of the faithful servants and followers of our adorable Lord. And I am desirous to acknowledge how much I think myself obliged by the many favours I have received. Still let me keep in mind the spring of all mercies, spiritual and temporal. I regard the obedience of Christ as the fountain of all. O what a precious Saviour!

“When faith presents my Saviour’s
death,
And whispers, ‘That is thine,’
Sweetly my rising hours advance,
And peaceably decline.

“While such my views, the radiant sun
Sheds a more sprightly ray;
Each object smiles, all nature charms,
I sing my hours away.”

The goodness and faithfulness of God were favourite subjects with Jenny. She saw that all her trials were designed for good; and that God afflicted her in very faithfulness and love. She could say, with David, “As for God, his word is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried, he is a buckler to them that trust in Him.” A

proper view of her own sinful state by nature, and of the Lord's gracious dealings with her, produced in her an humble dependance upon, and resignation to his will. Having proved Him to be a God who cared for her, she was enabled to give up herself and all her concerns to his management. She saw the hand of God in every event; that he directs all in infinite wisdom; and, on this principle it was, that she experienced calmness and composure of mind. Being assured that her Leader is Almighty, she cannot be so dismayed and cast down as those persons who consider themselves as their own guides and directors. In short, she became wise by the wisdom of her Heavenly Father, and happy in his happiness.

Reader, what are the effects of God's dealings toward you? Do you know anything of the saving grace of the Gospel? Have you ever been brought to a sense of your own vileness and helplessness? Do you look to the same adorable Saviour? Do you depend upon him, and are you living to him? Are trust, resignation, patience, love, and gratitude, active within you? The Lord give you understanding in all things. And that you may "obtain that which God has pro-

inised, may he make you to love that which he doth command."

Jenny Hickling died in May, 1822, at the age of 75, having been confined to her bed 62 years, and exhibited, to the last, the same hope, faith, and patience, which is described in the preceding pages. Thus she lived and died, a bright example of the power of divine grace upon the heart of the Christian. She was enabled, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, to rise above the trials and sufferings of this life, and to look forward to the blessed hope of an everlasting life, where pain and sorrow shall not come.





*Afflicted Saints more to be congratulated
than prosperous sinners.*

Now I'm convinced the Lord is kind
To those of heart sincere;
Yet once my foolish thoughts repin'd,
And border'd on despair.

I griev'd to see the wicked thrive,
And spoke with angry breath,
"How pleasant and profane they live,
"How peaceful is their death!

"With well-fed flesh and haughty eyes
"They lay their fears to sleep;
"Against the heavens their slander rise,
"Whilst saints in silence weep.

“In vain I lift my hands to pray,
“And cleanse my heart in vain;
“For I am chasten’d all the day,
“The night renews my pain.”

Yet while my tongue indulg’d complaints
I felt my heart reprove;

“Sure I shall thus offend thy saints,
“And grieve the souls I love.”

But still I found my doubts too hard,
The conflict too severe,
Till I retir’d to search thy word,
And learn thy secrets there.

There, as in some prophetic glass,
I saw the sinner’s feet,
High mounted on a slippery place,
Beside a fiery pit.

I heard the wretch profanely boast,
Till at thy frown he fell;
His honours in a dream were lost,
And he awakes in hell.

Lord, what an envious fool I was!
How like a thoughtless beast!
Thus to suspect thy promis’d grace,
And think the wicked blest.

Yet I was kept from full despair,
Upheld by power unknown;
That blessed hand that broke the snare,
Shall guide me to thy throne.



AFFLICTION SANCTIFIED.

Affliction is a stormy deep,
Where wave resounds to wave;
Though o'er my head the billows roll,
I know the Lord can save.

The hand that now withholds my joys,
Can reinstate my peace;
And he who bade the tempest roar,
Can bid that tempest cease

In the dark watches of the night
I'll count his mercies o'er ;
I'll praise him for ten thousand past,
And humbly sue for more.

When darkness and when sorrows rose,
And press'd on every side,
The Lord has still sustain'd my steps,
And still has been my Guide.

Here will I rest, and build my hopes
Nor murmur at his rod ;
He's more than all the world to me
My Health, my Life, my God !





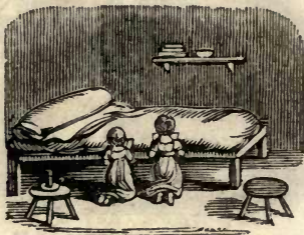
Consolation.

Amidst these various scenes of ills,
Each stroke some kind design fulfils ;
And shall I murmur at my God,
When sovereign love directs the rod ?

Peace, rebel thoughts! I'll not complain,
My Father's smiles suspend my pain;
Smiles, that a thousand joys impart,
And pour the balm that heals the smart.

Though Heaven afflicts I'll not repine,
Each heartfelt comfort still is mine;
Comforts that shall o'er death prevail,
And journey with me through the vale.

Dear Jesus, smooth that rugged way,
And lead me to the realms of day,
To milder skies, and lighter plains,
Where everlasting sunshine reigns.



The Contrite Heart.

The Lord will happiness divine
 On contrite hearts bestow:
 Then tell me, gracious God, is mine
 A contrite heart, or no ?

I hear, but seem to hear in vain,
 Insensible as steel ;
 If aught is felt, 'tis only pain,
 To find I cannot feel.

I sometimes think myself inclin'd
 To love thee, if I could ;
 But often feel another mind,
 Averse to all that's good.

My best desires are faint and few,
I fain would strive for more;
But when I cry, "My strength renew"
Seem weaker than before.

Thy saints are comforted, I know,
And love thy house of prayer;
I therefore go where others go,
But find no comfort there.

O make this heart rejoice or ache;
Decide this doubt for me;
And if it be not broken, break,
And heal it if it be.





The Death of the Righteous.

“O most delightful hour by man
 Experienc'd here below,
 The hour that terminates his span,
 His folly, and his wo !

“ Worlds should not bribe me back to
 tread
 Again life's dreary waste,
 To see again my day o'erspread
 With all the gloomy past.

“ My home henceforth is in the skies ;
 Earth, seas, and sun, adieu ;
 All heaven unfolded to my eyes,
 I have no sight for you.”

So speaks the Christian, firm possess'd
 Of faith's supporting rod,
 Then breathes his soul into its rest,
 The bosom of his God.